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TAGS: PREL PHUM KPKO SU CD FR  
SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA ON CHAD; SEES LIBYA ANGLING TO DELIVER  
DEBY-BASHIR MEETING

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young. Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: Chad President Deby's military gains have outpaced consolidation of his political position, French AF DAS-Equivalent for Western and Central Africa Christine Fages commented in a brief December 5 meeting with AF/SPG Director Timothy Shortley and Africa Watcher. A Deby-Bashir meeting was in the offing, Fages believed, but Libya wanted to be the driving force, so as to demonstrate its staying power as a player on Darfur. Fages suggested the USG could play a highly constructive role in Chad by maintaining channels to the rebels, reinforcing the need for Deby to respect the electoral calendar regardless of spikes in violence, and, if possible, by helping train Chad's aerial assets. Neither EUFOR nor MINURCAT was capable of checking JEM recruitment in IDP camps, she argued. From a Chadian perspective, rebel leadership drawn from the Goran tribe would be preferable to that of other ethnic groups whose populations spill over the border into Sudan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Addressing efforts to arrange a meeting between Sudan President Bashir and Chad President Deby, DAS-Equivalent for Western and Central Africa Christine Fages noted the two leaders had missed a chance at Doha, where they were both present; however, she speculated that Libya wanted credit for orchestrating such an encounter and would not let it take place in Qatar. Delivering a Deby-Bashir meeting would demonstrate, in Tripoli's thinking, that Libya remained a player in "the game" on Sudan, Fages speculated. She relayed rumors of a possible summit as early as 15 December. (Note: AU-UN Envoy Bassole told SE Williamson and AF/SPG Shortley later (septel) that he judged a Deby-Bashir meeting was unlikely by end-2008.)

¶3. (C) Turning to Deby's domestic situation, Fages stated the Chadian leader's position had strengthened militarily since February, thanks to acquired augmented air assets, notably helicopters. Augmented military force, however, did not equate with enhanced political influence. The 13 August agreement with Chadian rebels had helped Deby's standing internationally, but it would be judged by whether the rebels saw tangible deliverables. The USG could play a constructive role, she suggested, by maintaining contact with the rebels and by reinforcing the message to Deby on the need to maintain the electoral calendar, even if violence spikes anew in the east. She also drew USG attention to the need for military training for Deby's air assets, regretting this was off limits for the GoF due to restrictions on training the Ukrainian pilots employed by Chad as well as a lack of French technical expertise in dealing with Sukhoi aircraft. (She emphasized there was no indigenous Chadian air capability.) Shortley suggested that French AF PDAS-Equivalent Caroline Dumas could raise this point again during December 16 EU-U.S. consultations on Africa in Washington.

¶4. (C) Deby's military advantages had grown, Fages reiterated, but shifting troop loyalty remained a core problem and Deby had to be watchful of assassination. The JEM, moreover, were redoubtable fighters. Asked how the GoF

or EUFOR could check JEM recruitment in IDP camps within Chad, Fages confessed to being stymied. French gendarmes with EUFOR were temporarily providing camp security, a function that MINURCAT would assume, but all international forces were limited to the camp perimeter, with the Government of Chad itself responsible for internal camp security. She described the camp at Beida, in particular, as a virtual "JEM city."

¶5. (C) Rebels within Chad still lacked clear leadership, with tribal rivalry and identity a sticking point, Fages commented. Mahamat Nouri was an optimal candidate to whom Chadian opposition could rally. There was an advantage in Nouri's being from the Goran tribe, since they did not straddle the border with Sudan, unlike the Arab, Bidayat or Zagawa, thus minimizing the risk that a Goran-driven rebel movement would replicate the pattern of JEM cross-border activities. From Bashir's perspective, however, an Arab-led rebellion would cause maximum difficulty for Deby, since it would find a ready base of support within Sudanese territory.

¶6. (U) AF/SPG Director Shortley cleared this message.

STAPLETON